

Faculty member: Matthew Sage (CMT department)

Abstract: *Choir* by Pope.L at the Whitney Museum

Pope.L is an acclaimed Chicago-based artist whose work with painting, performance, and installations has received much praise and increased attention. This October he installed *Choir* at the prestigious Whitney Museum in New York City; this new installation focuses on his continued exploration of water in gallery spaces. For *Choir*, a 1,000-gallon water tank that acts as a public fountain was installed at the gallery. The tank fills and drains over a roughly 40-minute span of time. NEIU part-time faculty member Matthew Sage (CMT department) was asked to create, design, and collaborate on sound components to accompany this installation. Sage treated archival choir and vocal samples selected by the artist as well as collecting and editing sounds from the installation process of the tank in the gallery space. These sounds were mixed, edited, and are then played back in the gallery space through a three-channel stereo speaker system. This highly spatial audio installation is joined with a four-microphone amplification system Sage also designed and mixed to further enhance the filling and draining of the tank as heard in the gallery space. Inspired largely by deep listening practices championed by Pauline Oliveros and chance music operations pioneered by John Cage, Sage, in collaboration with Pope.L, looked to treat this public fountain as much as a piece of infrastructure as also an instrument that is capable of singing in a disembodied way that is rewarded by sustained close attention. The highly resonant body of the PVC tank creates sonorous layers of sound that dynamically fluctuate through the draining and filling process. When amplified by the microphones and conjoined with other collected sounds and treated choral samples, an illusion of the tank filling with voices from the past creates a ghostly atmospheric presence in the gallery. The sheer size of the tank, coursing with wiring, microphones and sound equipment, copper piping, and nearly 1,000 gallons of water, is paired with this powerful audio to create an immersive viewer experience. Pope.L is interested in considering Jim Crowe and the history of segregation in America in this work; the tank is filled with an inverted water fountain, wall texts in the all-black gallery point to racist jargon, ideas of indivisibility and singularity, and a conflicted sense of identity. As a final contribution, The Whitney invited Pope.L and Sage to create an audio installation in the main lobby of the museum; here, a series of aqueous dripping sounds run on a seemingly sporadic schedule, stopping and starting in intervals, creating a humorous but dreadful sense of leaking.

*Choir* opened in the first floor gallery at the Whitney Museum in New York on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and will remain installed until early 2020.

The Whitney Museum's information concerning this installation can be found here:

<https://whitney.org/exhibitions/pope-l>